



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1, 1869.

CONCERNING ORGANS, ORGANISTS, AND ORGAN MUSIC.

WE are in the habit of hearing a statement repeated—generally by those who are foreign to us, but occasionally, too, by others who are altogether free from a suspicion of alien blood—to the effect that we, as a people (although deft of finger and big of bone), are singularly impervious to art influences; that, in short, however high we may stand as mechanics, we are simply nowhere as musicians.

Now, we have no intention at present of entering into the general question as to whether this statement is altogether true or false; it must suffice for us to consider the matter just so far as it bears upon the subject we have in hand, and leave the rest to another occasion. It appears to us, then, that this unflattering charge is somewhat borne out and illustrated by the history of Organs, Organists, and Organ-music, or at least that portion of it dating from the commencement of the present century.

Many who are now living amongst us must be in a position to remember the time when organs in this country were of the most primitive description, and exhibited all the crudity of construction, without the artistic excellence, of the Snetzler and Schmidt period. The swell compass seldom or never extended below “fiddle G” or “tenor C;” the compass of the pedal board barely exceeded an octave, and the utter absence of “composition pedals,” or any mechanical means of overcoming, or at least reducing, the difficulties natural to an instrument of such magnitude, rendered the duties of a cathedral organist considerably more onerous than pleasant: or rather, we should have said, *might* have rendered; for, in point of fact, organ playing was at this time in its infancy, and a repertory of organ music, *per se*, was hardly in existence. It is true that various publications saw the light under the general title of organ-music, but as they were almost equally adapted to the harpsichord and other stringed instruments of that description, it was a mere farce to call that organ music which failed to bring into play the principal characteristics of the instrument for which it was intended.

It has always been a matter of surprise to us how the cathedral organists of seventy years ago succeeded in playing through the music of an ordinary Sunday service on such unmanageable instruments as they then possessed. It is not quite an easy matter even now to accompany a choir, and successfully steer it through the difficulties of such anthems as “God is our hope” (Greene), or “O where shall wisdom be found” (Boyce), with organs possessed of all the various mechanical contrivances now in vogue; but what must it have been then? Again, with regard to voluntaries, it might be interesting to know what were the Preludes, the Interludes and Postludes of this period. We have heard a story told of an old white-haired gentleman, a professional organist (for professional organists had frequently, at that time, both the appearance and manners of gentlemen), who played on an instrument evidently of ancient date. His extemporaneous effusions were of that order not unfrequently heard even now,—a mere string of sus-

pensions, without melody, time, or rhythm. It appeared that one of the few pedal pipes belonging to this organ had succeeded in gaining his affections, through having previously effected a bond of sympathy with a neighbouring window. When this pedal pipe sounded, the window emitted a dignified and solemn rattle, which gratified the old gentleman exceedingly, and produced a gentle titillation amongst various members of the congregation, who were wont to speak of it as “a fine cathedral effect.” Having once been remonstrated with on account of an unusually prolonged use he had just made of this effect, he gravely replied: “Pedals are difficult matters to manage; therefore, when I succeed in getting my foot on a good one, I think it well to keep it!” And we have no doubt this was the guiding principle of nine out of every ten organists of the period.

But even then the night was waning. And when the full light of morning shone upon the faces of the hitherto benighted organists of England, great was the flutter and excitement. From Germany came the light; therefore, towards Germany were all eyes turned. And the result of this new light was exhibited in the reconstruction of old organs, and the building of new, upon principles almost entirely in conformity with those which had found general acceptance in Germany some years before. The pedal compass became extended, the CC swell was inaugurated; equal temperament began to be looked upon as a necessity; and a large number of stops, which may be recognized by their German names, were successfully imitated by English builders and introduced into English organs.

The peculiar characteristics of the English nature had displayed themselves, first, in the quiet and easy nonchalance with which the previous state of ignorance and wretchedness had been regarded; and, secondly, in the vigour and activity displayed when the sluggish nature had been fairly aroused, and the necessity for reform had become thoroughly apparent. And we may safely aver that the reconstruction movement which succeeded, whether considered in relation to the rapidity with which it was carried out, or its eventual completeness, remains almost unparalleled in the history of any art.

It will naturally be supposed that this great movement was not carried through to its completion without the committal of some blunders. Ardent reformers are apt, in the freshness of their enthusiastic natures, to lay hold of the most salient points of a new theory, and ignore others which, presenting no remarkable external features, occasionally contain within themselves the embodiment of an important law; and so it was in this case. For whilst the previously mentioned improvements were effected with great success, the erroneous notion was still entertained that in the building of a large organ, the only means of gaining an accession of power was by increasing the number of stops of the same calibre; for example, in the specification of the York Cathedral organ, built after the fire of 1829, there were in the great organ six stops of what would be understood as 8 feet pitch, six of 4 feet, two of 3 feet, two of 2 feet, four mixtures, and four 8 feet trumpets! And it should be understood that almost all these duplicates were, both in name and quality of tone, identical.

This false principle, fortunately, was followed in but a few instances; for the true system of natural harmonics was soon recognized and adopted; and a symmetrical tonal column produced, by which the

power and (still more) the variety of the instrument were greatly increased. We may, therefore, now say with truth, that in mechanical contrivances, artistic finish, and scientific adjustment, the best organs of the best English builders are little, if at all, behind the finest specimens of Continental work. And here we might perhaps be allowed to remark, parenthetically, that if the clergy and wardens of our churches were to give more attention to obtaining finish, balance, and completeness, in the organs under their care, instead of desiring to obtain a multitude of stops at the smallest possible cost, we should have a very different class of instruments from the asthmatic specimens which are, now-a-days, only too numerous. Though, on the other hand, if the organ-builder had a proper respect for himself and his calling, he would refuse to lend himself to the dissemination of cheap abominations. Let him not forget the beneficial effect which resulted, at least in the architectural world, from the rebuke administered by Welby Pugin to the Irish bishop, who, after explaining that he wanted a church to accommodate a large number of people, named an absurdly inadequate sum as the extreme amount he could spare for it. "Make it three and sixpence more, my lord," said Pugin, "and have a tower and spire complete!"

The history of modern organ-playing presents, in so many respects, the same features as the history of organ-building, that it leaves us little to say on the subject. With the improved facilities for managing the organ came an improvement in playing, an accession of interest, and an extension of public sympathy; all these things working together to place the organists of England in a position in no degree below those of the most musical nations of Europe. And, we may add, should the coming crop of young organists in this country fulfil, in any reasonable degree, the promise they are now giving, we may look forward with confidence to their taking, at no very distant period, a position which will render them a credit to the nation.

But, although these two branches of musical art require artistic qualities of a certain order, we still feel that the statement with which this paper commenced has not yet been disproved. On the contrary, we doubt whether it has not been rather strengthened; for, although we have proved ourselves to be little, if at all, behind other nations in mechanical dexterity—which has never been doubted—it yet remains for us to dispose of the charge concerning our want of artistic feeling. This qualification, so necessary to a musician, is perhaps the only one at present wanting in the organ-builders and organists of this period; and it cannot fail to be recognised as a serious defect in those two branches of the art. But how much more serious proportions would this defect assume were we to find it in composers of organ music; for we hold it to be an unmistakeable fact that a musical composition without artistic feeling is not a *musical* composition at all. And this suggests a direful question: is it in consequence of the absence of this essential that the third branch of our subject has failed to keep pace with the other two? For, undoubtedly, in the production of original music for this noble instrument, we are still as far behind other nations as we ever were. The improvements in organ-building and organ-playing brought a vast amount of German music under our hands; but neither organists nor composers were stimulated by it to the production of original compositions, at

least to any perceptible extent. The names of those of our countrymen who *have* written, might be all told on the fingers of one hand; and the number of their productions is almost equally small. We have been occasionally favoured with one or two charming *Andantes*, or preludial pieces, but these have only served to call attention to the general nakedness of the land; and even one or two of the composers we have just hinted at have unaccountably ceased to make a sign, when they might, by their talents, have founded a school; which adds another element of difficulty in forming anything like a definite hypothesis to account for these matters. The result, however, of all this has been to cause arrangements to multiply *ad nauseam*; and the demand, which might otherwise have been created for original matter, has been diverted into less deserving channels. This fact is the more aggravating when we remember how many eminent musicians there are amongst us who have had, and still have it in their power to add lustre to their name and country.

One of the principal reasons, we suppose, that guides composers in determining whether they shall continue or cease in the production of new works, is the measure of success meted out to each particular venture. It has been our lot frequently to hear the remark, "If this is successful, I shall continue writing; if not, I shall give it up." Now, we must remind all who argue in this way, that it was not thus the great composers argued (if they argued at all about it) or worked (and they certainly *did* work). They were *always* producing, because—in addition to that inward feeling which impels the true inventor to realise his ideas, or put his conceptions into definite form—there was a true and tender devotion which the artist always felt for his art, and which caused him to feel happiest when working in it. Should a composition fail in making a success, it gave him no enduring concern; for he well knew the spring whence it had come was still flowing. But we think it has always been a distinguishing characteristic in a man of large mind to make light of matters of this nature; whilst, on the other hand, the man of limited intellect is constantly insisting upon the recognition, as a great work, of his one unsuccessful composition, ere he will think of commencing another, which might possibly turn out—if not a great effort—at least an improvement on the previous one. How often do we hear the young Beethovens and Purcells of the present day—on being told by one of those terribly "good-natured friends" what a failure their composition turned out the previous evening,—reply, "Ah! it doesn't matter; we have got other works in hand which may turn the tables entirely." The disappointed Jones, on the contrary, exhibits his disgust at the public want of appreciation, and says he shall not again waste his valuable time and talents in the endeavour to enlighten an ignorant and ungrateful public; and lays flattering unction to his little soul by thinking over the early struggles of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and—Jones!

It may not be altogether without value if we dwell for a moment on a few of the characteristics of "the disappointed musician;" who, in one or other of his peculiar features, is known to every one, and in the aggregate of his oddities is recognised as a bore of the first order. He generally has a circle of good-natured friends, who are not altogether unwilling to accept his estimate of his own abilities; and thus render his conceit, and his tendency to complain of

his treatment, chronic. These friends, who invariably speak of him as "poor Jones," busy themselves in the endeavour to obtain pupils for him; and, in the event of their succeeding, Jones, instead of commencing in an honest and manly way to improve his pupils in the art, takes the earliest opportunity of initiating them into the mysteries of the unsuccessful composition, and drivels over it to such an extent that the pupils—feeling they have learnt a little too much of Jones, and much too little of music—decline to continue their lessons, and he is once more a martyr. There is, too, a musical character less easily recognised; one who, either from a want of leisure or inclination, produces a composition at very wide intervals, and, in consequence, makes no "way" in his art. All those who have gone through the experience of producing original matter, will agree with us that in the working out of a conception several ideas are evolved of a novel and useful nature which place us, so to speak, on a higher step of the ladder of experience; but which, if not quickly followed up, gradually fade from the mind, eventually landing us just where we were before. Therefore it is, this composer's efforts exhibit such a remarkable similarity to each other, and such an entire want of natural development and improvement.

Again, there is another and rather a numerous class of musicians who, simply because they have studied the art of thorough-bass and counterpoint, think themselves quite qualified to produce any number of musical compositions, utterly regardless of the fact that inspiration is the first thing necessary, and that without it they could no more become composers than, by the simple process of blackening their faces, they could convert themselves into actual negroes. They are quite unable to see that their line of argument would go to prove that a course of English grammar alone would enable a man to become a poet or dramatist.

But the most extraordinary specimen of all is the man who, barely knowing the primary rules in music, and innocent of the slightest suspicion of invention, thinks he is bound to assert himself as a composer merely because he plays a church organ!—entertaining the notion that a man who plays a hymn-tune and trains a choir would be admitting his education to be incomplete, if he failed to claim the power of composing an Oratorio. Fortunately, he seldom or never tries; but ordinarily confines himself to such moderate flights as single and double chants, kyries, and hymn-tunes; sometimes venturing to write an anthem "for a special occasion," which, in course of time, is nervously exhibited to some higher authority, with the remark,—“It is not unlikely you may find some errors in it, for it was written in a great hurry, and I have not had leisure to look it over since.” Should it be answered that there are several mistakes in it—and, indeed, the whole thing is a mistake—his disappointment and chagrin shows itself plainly, though he tries to put it off with the excuse,—“Ah! possibly it is rather queer; but I should like you, to see some of the things I have not quite finished; very different from this, I assure you.” It is perfectly useless to explain to him how much better it would be were he to confine himself to that which he really can do decently, without striving after that for which he does not possess a single qualification. You might as well hope to soothe a cat by stroking its hair the wrong way, as expect to smooth matters over with him whilst denying him the only merit he cares to claim.

We cannot tell whether the tendency of these remarks will be to prove the truth of the charge mentioned in the opening of this paper. Our intention was merely to attract the notice of English musicians to the fact that, whilst other matters more or less intimately connected with organs are developing themselves in a natural and healthy manner, organ compositions of any value still remain comparatively limited in number. There have certainly been, within the last twelve months, some indications of returning consciousness on the part of several well-known writers, in the shape of an issue of original compositions for the organ. But how long may this activity be expected to last? Is it the result of a mere passing whim, or is it destined to be the commencement of a thorough awakening from the lethargy which has so long held entire possession of them?

We should be glad, too, if some of our remarks tended to dispel the notion, in however small a degree, that the art of composing music is a mere question of education, and nothing more. And doubly gratified should we be to learn we had been the means of refuting the more widely-spread supposition, that good music can be written by those who have had no education in the art of composing.

MONDAY POPULAR CONCERTS.

At the Concert on the 7th ult., Corelli's Violin Sonata in D major, very excellently played by Herr Straus, was historically interesting, and received that well measured applause with which a schoolmaster is greeted when he delivers a scientific lecture to his pupils. Mr. J. F. Barnett's performance of Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonata, Op. 53, was replete with new readings; but remarkable for that rapidity and facility of execution of which he has already given such ample proof before the public. Beethoven's Septet, performed to perfection by Messrs. Straus, H. Blagrove, Lazarus, C. Harper, Wotton, Piatti, and Reynolds delighted every hearer, as it always does whenever and wherever it is played. The last Concert before Christmas, on the 14th ult., introduced Schubert's Quartet in G major, for the first time. The most ardent admirer of this composer could scarcely say that the first movement of this work appeals to any save those who blindly admit that incoherence must be beauty; and that what they do not understand must of necessity be beyond them. Passages indeed there are so exquisite as to make us long for that power which can turn such wealth of invention to the best account; but the effect of the entire movement is disappointing, a feeling which is materially aided by its excessive length. The *Andante*, based on a beautiful and melodious subject, and the *Scherzo* and *Trio* (two movements most happily contrasted), made ample amends, however, for the shortcomings of the first movement; and the *Finale* (a most animated movement, full of effect), brought the Quartet to a termination with the utmost success; and the applause was loud and general. Miss Agnes Zimmermann, who made her first appearance at these Concerts, played Mendelssohn's early Pianoforte Sonata in E major, with a finished grace, power, and executive ability which fairly took the audience by surprise. No Sonata, perhaps, could have been selected more capable of testing the qualifications of a really intellectual pianist; for into this work the composer seems to have thrown so many different shades of feeling, and to have endeavoured so earnestly to give utterance to his innermost thoughts in the language he had chosen, that mere manipulative power would be but of small service in the interpretation of such a composition. That Miss Zimmermann was fully competent to grapple with all the difficulties we have mentioned was manifest to all: the placid opening, in 3/4 rhythm, was most exquisitely phrased, the *Scherzo* and *Trio* (the first, *Tempo di Marcia*, in F sharp minor,